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Rising cyber scams echo in NA

House told NCCIA received over 150,000 cybercrime complaints in a year

By Syed Irfan Raza

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly on Friday took up the issue of increasing cybercrimes in the country, which are badly affecting the masses.

Members highlighted the problem of fake driving challans, as well as fraudulent messages from educational institutions, banks, mobile phone companies and other entities. It was also informed that in some cases people responded to such fake messages and later faced charges of blasphemy and anti-state activities, resulting in imprisonment.

On the other hand, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry claimed that necessary steps were being taken to introduce reforms in the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) in order to effectively tackle cybercrimes.

PTI leader Sheryar Afridi informed the House that a large number of young people were facing cases and imprisonment after being declared guilty of committing blasphemy and anti-state activities.

“A number of people told me outside Adiala jail that they and their family members are facing cases after responding to some fake messages on the internet from people posing as representatives of educational institutions, banks and other organisations,” he added.

PPP legislator Shazia Marri drew the attention of the assembly to fake traffic challans (fines) sent by fraudsters and hackers. She said a large number of people had been cheated through such messages, as they believed them to be genuine and paid fines to the perpetrators.

In response, National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said he had also received such messages claiming that he had committed traffic violations and was liable to pay fines.

Meanwhile, Mr Chaudhry said the NCCIA had received over 150,000 complaints last year. He said the best officers had been appointed to the agency and that efforts were under way to enhance its capacity.

He said over 81,000 of these complaints were related to financial crimes, and that 1,095 accused persons had been arrested. He added that cellular companies had been directed to enhance their security features for the issuance of SIMs.

Responding to a question, Mr Chaudhry said the air quality of Islamabad had improved compared to a year ago. He said measures such as vehicle emission certification were among the steps taken to improve the environment.

To another question, the minister expressed the government’s commitment to purging Islamabad of all kinds of encroachments.

Responding to a calling attention notice, he said Vision 2027 would be announced this month for the development of the federal capital territory.

Privatisation

Later, State Minister for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani told the House that PIA had been privatised in the most transparent manner in accordance with the law and the Constitution. He clarified that only the core operations of the airline had been privatised, while PIA-owned hotels were not part of the transaction.

Expressing confidence in the move, Bilal Kayani said the privatisation would improve service delivery and strengthen the airline’s financial position.

Responding to a calling attention notice, Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan said interventions had been made to achieve the target of \$6bn in exports.

Bills introduced

Meanwhile, several bills were laid before the House. These included the Export Development Fund Amendment Bill, 2026; the National Tariff Commission Amendment Bill, 2026; the Export-Import Bank of Pakistan Amendment Bill, 2026; the Pakistan Telecommunication Reorganisation Amendment Bill; the Life Insurance Nationalisation Amendment Bill; the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Amendment Bill; the Islamabad Capital Territory Condominium (Ownership and Management) Bill; and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Amendment Bill, 2026.

Number of SEZs surges to 44 under CPEC 2.0

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The number of approved special economic zones has surged dramatically from seven to 44 in the second phase of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), including notification of 37 new SEZs through coordinated efforts led by the Board of Investment (BoI).

The increase in approval rate was revealed on Friday during a briefing on Pakistan’s engagement with China under the second phase of CPEC, with particular focus on SEZ-led industrialisation and Pakistan-China business-to-business (B2B) cooperation, which form the backbone of the upgraded CPEC framework.

The BoI serves as the lead Pakistani agency for the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Industrial Cooperation, with China’s National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) as the counterpart lead agency. Since its inception, Project Management Unit of the CPEC-Industrial Cooperation Development Project (PMU CPEC-ICDP) has played a pivotal role in revitalising Pakistan’s SEZ framework.

Minister for Board of Investment, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, visited to the Project Management Unit of the CPEC Industrial Cooperation Development Project (PMU CPEC-ICDP) at the Board of Investment, Islamabad, to review progress on industrial cooperation and the development of SEZs under CPEC Phase-II.

Key achievements highlighted during the briefing included progress on the Karachi Industrial Park (KIP), development initiatives for the Gilgit-Baltistan SEZ, and the approval of the Land Lease Policy for Bin Qasim Industrial Park (BQIP), which has addressed a longstanding structural bottleneck for investors.

The minister was also informed of BoI’s facilitation in ensuring the provision of utilities to SEZs, enabling their transition from planning stages to operational readiness.

It was explained during the briefing that the long-term plan for CPEC Industrial Cooperation has been finalised and it is being implemented through a structured Action Plan aligned with the transition towards CPEC, dubbed ‘CPEC Phase 2.0’, emphasising industry-led growth, export-oriented manufacturing, technology transfer, and value addition, with SEZs serving as anchor platforms.

The alignment of CPEC Industrial Cooperation with the government’s “Uraan Pakistan” SEs Framework was also highlighted, particularly in advancing exports, enhancing competitiveness, and promoting sustainable economic development through joint-venture-based industrialisation.

Mr Sheikh was further informed that 2026 will mark the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China, and that PMU CPEC-ICDP has planned a series of commemorative and investment-focused initiatives during the year to further deepen bilateral industrial cooperation.

The BoI reaffirmed its strong commitment to proactive investor facilitation, policy coordination, and effective implementation of the second phase of CPEC industrial cooperation initiatives, and it will continue to work closely with all federal and provincial stakeholders to ensure a predictable, transparent, and investor-friendly environment for domestic and foreign investors.

The briefing underscored BoI’s structured approach to investment promotion and investor outreach, particularly with Chinese enterprises.



KARACHI: Commuters travel along a road in low visibility, as foggy conditions disrupted the morning routine in the port city. Such conditions are often caused by high humidity and low temperatures in other parts of the country. —AFP

Won’t join Fawad’s group, says Qureshi

• Declares he cannot deviate from party policy • Says dialogue necessary to break political deadlock • Maintains that ‘resistance eventually leads to reconciliation’

By Wajih Ahmad Sheikh

LAHORE: Incarcerated PTI vice chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi said on Friday that he could not deviate from the party’s policy.

He shared his views on political dialogue, party policy and regional affairs during an informal interaction with reporters inside an anti-terrorism court (ATC), where he was brought for the hearings on his bail petitions in cases related to the May 9 riots.

Responding to a question about whether he would support PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry’s proposed National Dialogue Committee, Mr Qureshi said that, as the party’s vice chairman, he could not deviate from PTI policy.

However, he said it was necessary to consider a viable solution to the prevailing political situation.

“Resistance eventually leads to reconciliation,” Mr Qureshi remarked, asserting that dialogue was the only way forward for the country.

He said Leader of the Opposition Mehmood Khan Achakzai was in a better position to decide the future course of action, as PTI founder Imran Khan had empowered him to hold negotiations.

Mr Qureshi said PTI leaders were currently behind bars and had limited access to information, which constrained their ability to fully assess developments.

Asked whether Mr Chaudhry had met him with his consent, the PTI vice chairman said they had been part of the same political party.

He added that Mr Chaudhry had visited him in hospital to inquire about his health, asking how one could refuse to meet a guest.

Commenting on foreign policy, Mr Qureshi said Pakistan had extended significant assistance to Afghanistan and had a legitimate demand that Afghan soil should not be used against Pakistan.

He said if Afghanistan sought stability, it would need to maintain good relations with

Islamabad.

Pakistan desired peace, and Afghanistan should cooperate in counter-terrorism efforts, he added.

On regional security, the PTI leader said the situation along the Iran border was currently under control.

Referring to relations with India, he said Pakistan had defeated India in war and Allah had granted the country honour. However, he cautioned that the threat from India had not yet fully subsided.

Earlier, the court extended the pre-arrest bail of Mr Qureshi till Feb 13 in cases related to the burning of a PML-N office in Model Town and a container near Kalma Chowk during the May 9 riots.

The court directed the petitioner’s counsel to present final arguments at the next hearing.

Separately, the court also extended the pre-arrest bail of PTI leaders Asad Umar, Fawad Chaudhry, Azam Swati and two sisters of Imran Khan in the same cases.

Imaan, Hadi challenge arrest orders after judge demands their production

• Petition argues trial court unlawfully curtailed their right of defence, issued warrants without meeting mandatory legal requirements • Additional district & sessions judge orders FIA, police officials to arrest them ‘within 24 hours’

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: Lawyer and activist Imaan Mazari-Hazir and her husband, Hadi Ali Chattha, on Friday challenged their arrest orders in a case linked to controversial social media posts.

In a petition filed before the Islamabad High Court, they argued that the trial court had unlawfully curtailed their right of defence, issued arrest warrants without fulfilling mandatory legal requirements, and ordered judicial custody along with virtual production.

The petition challenged the trial court’s January 15 order as legally unsustainable and requested the IHC to declare the arrest warrants null and void and restrain the authorities from arresting the petitioners.

Earlier in the today, a district and sessions court once again ordered their arrest within 24 hours in the same case.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Muhammad Afzal Majoka, who was hearing the matter, warned of contempt proceedings in case of non-compliance.

The court also expressed strong displeasure over the failure of the police and the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) to execute earlier arrest warrants.

During the hearing, an NCCIA prosecutor appeared before the court. Judge Majoka repeatedly questioned the authorities over the non-appearance of the accused, asking why Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha had not been arrested and produced before the court. “Where are the accused and why were they not produced?” the judge remarked, summoning the DIG Islamabad Police and FIA officials to explain the delay.

The public prosecutor submitted replies under Section 342 of the Criminal Procedure Code on behalf of the accused during the proceedings.

After a brief recess, DIG Islamabad Police Jawad Tariq appeared before the court. Expressing anger, Judge Majoka questioned the credibility of law enforcement agencies, stating that the non-execution of warrants in Islamabad raised serious concerns. He directed the DIG to arrest the accused “from anywhere — whether in Pakistan, India or Afghanistan,” adding that they could be “at sea or in the air” but must be apprehended

within 24 hours.

The DIG assured the court that the warrants would be executed. The judge stated that the warrants would be handed over by 10am and warned that failure to comply would result in contempt of court proceedings.

Later, the NCCIA director also appeared before the court and informed it that a four-member team had been formed to arrest the accused, but they were not found at their stated addresses and were allegedly deliberately hiding. Judge Majoka questioned how arrests could not be made in Islamabad if the accused were present in the city and ordered that a senior officer ensure execution of the warrants.

The court directed that no police officer below the rank of SP and no NCCIA official below the rank of deputy director be assigned the task. Fresh arrest warrants were issued, with orders to arrest the accused and produce them before the court via video link. The hearing was adjourned till Saturday (today).

In a written order issued later, the court observed that the accused had deliberately absconded to evade arrest and granted law enforcement authorities 24 hours to comply with its directions.

Pension is a right, not employer’s largesse: Supreme Court

Sets aside ruling of service tribunal on plea by ex-auditor

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Friday affirmed that pension is a vested constitutional right and not a bounty or something given out of generosity by the employer.

The employee earns these benefits through long, continuous, faithful and unblemished service, observed Justice Muhammad Shafi Siddiqui in a six-page judgement that upheld the right of a former civil servant to receive pension benefits despite the fact that he had applied for pension 13 years after his resignation.

Justice Siddiqui was a member of a three-judge SC bench headed by Justice Naheem Akhtar Afghan, which also comprised Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb.

The bench had taken up an appeal filed by Muhammad Usman against the July 3, 2024 rejection of his plea by the Federal Service Tribunal (FST).

The appellant was a former senior auditor (BS-11) in the office of the Military Accountant General, Rawalpindi. He was held disentitled to pension benefits on the grounds that he had tendered resignation from public service and applied belatedly for the release of pensionary benefits, notwithstanding the fact that the requisite length of service — i.e. 20 years — had already been completed by the employee.

Earlier, his department dismissed the application on the grounds that the qualifying length of service for pension benefits was 25 years. Likewise, his subsequent application for condonation of the shortfall period was also declined on Oct 27, 2020.

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Pension bottleneck: Editorial on Page 6

The SC noted that since the resignation was tendered in September 2007, the petitioner, for the purposes of pension benefits, was required to have served for a period of 20 years, as the relevant clause (i) to sub-section (1) of Section 13 of the Civil Servants Act, 1973, had been amended through Ordinance No XXXIV of 2001 on Aug 4, 2001, whereby the qualifying service was reduced from 25 to 20 years.

During the hearing, Additional Attorney

General (AAG) Rashideen Nawaz Qasoori did not object to the fact that, at the relevant time when the resignation was tendered, the petitioner had completed the requisite period of 20 years.

However, the AAG opposed the grant of pension benefits to the petitioner on two counts: first, that the petitioner had belatedly applied for the pension claim; and second, that since he had tendered resignation on his own from public service, Regulation 418 of the Civil Service Regulations would disentitle him from such a claim.

The petitioner had moved the department for the first time to claim pension benefits in the year 2020, i.e. after a lapse of 13 years from the date of tendering resignation, which was later accepted. This delay was considered sufficient by the relevant department to disentitle the petitioner

from claiming pensionary benefits, the judgement noted.

However, treating CSR as an independent provision to oust a civil servant from claiming pension benefits after successful completion of the requisite length of service was misconceived and legally untenable, the SC ruled.

The apex court further held that both the FST and the concerned departmental authority had failed to understand the true spirit of Regulation 418 of the CSR, and that a belated application to claim pension benefits did not, by itself, constitute a ground for disentitlement.

While concluding, the SC set aside the FST order as unsustainable and converted the petition into an appeal, holding that the appellant was entitled to his pension benefits in accordance with law.